CHAPTER IV

THE WASHO CASE IN ECONOMIC THEORY

The Washo had no money, marketplaces, trade for profit, accumulation of capital, or inheritance as these relations are defined in standard economic parlance. Little trade was present, either among Washo or between Washo and non-Washo peoples. Goods and services did not move through profit-incentive, or for capital reserves and the accumulation of prestige goods. Goods did move, however, through the incentives of subsistence, fulfillment of ritual obligations, and the maintenance of social approval.

The following sections address certain theoretical problems in economic anthropology: non-market mechanisms of exchange, political power and the economy, barriers to economic development, prestige economy and money, and overproduction.

Non-market Mechanisms of Exchange

A market is a price setting mechanism in the form of a sociocultural institution of economic exchange. A market inovives exchange at bargained rates according to supply and demand. Generally Washo society would be described as having a "non-market" economy because it did not have marketplaces (a physical place where people customarily come to exchange), prices were not "set", and the value of goods or a service was not usually determined by what other goods or services they could be exchanged for.

Only in the distribution forms we have described as involving secondary social relations (gambling, trade, and payment for services) do we find anything analogous to market institutions. In Washo society the exchange or market value was usually overshadowed by personal, social, religious, or biological survival values. It is essential to include these non-market values in any equation that attempts to describe the regularities of Washo economics.

Few demands were set by the culture for economic goods. When these demands were filled individuals ceased working. There was no significant accumulation of property beyond immediate needs. Hoarding was impossible due to the requirement of sharing with relatives and friends. There was a constant social lien on the production of individuals and little social advantage to be gained by accumulating goods. The most renowned Washo among his own people in historic times, Gumalanga, behaved and dressed as the poorest among them. Gumalanga expressed the egalitarian orientation of Washo social values.

The eight forms of economic distribution discussed in Chapter III were the major mechanisms of distribution in Washo society. To varying degrees

and status values" as opposed to the subsistence economy which is "the exploitation of the plentiful natural resources available to any industrious individual." Among the Washo material goods flow almost indiscriminately in promoting subsistence and prestige. Washo social prerogatives and status values are intimately intertwined with the exploitation of natural resources.

Cappannari (1960, 140) wrote that "DuBois...makes clear that the 'monies' (that is, dentalia, woodpecker scalps, obsidian blades, and so on) of the Tolowa-Tututni served as a medium of exchange primarily in the prestige economy rather that the subsistence economy. The same applies to the 'monies' of the Shoshoneans." Money in this sense is a counter of prestige, usually items of highly congealed value in the world of social ritual, but not fully explained in terms of food, shelter, or defense. Prestige money is found among the Washo in the case of eagle feathers and fine woven baskets. These have congealed values for purposes of social ritual. They are also more significant in the context of social ritual than in the context of economic actuality, although ritual and economics coincide at many points.

Money is defined by Driver and Massey (1957, 382) as "material which possesses homogeneity, portability, divisibility, durability, and which serves as a medium of exchange, as a store of value, and as a standard of deferred payments." Pinenuts came the closest to being used as a "money" in Washo economy except that pinenuts were not very durable and lacked the compactness to serve as a concentrated store of value. Salt, eagle tail feathers, baskets, and skins were more concentrated in value. The Washo had no regular medium of exchange and no standard of deferred payments. In the definition used here they had no money. Three terms are now used to refer to wealth; bilada is U. S. currency, gidatwadota is a person's belongings, and m¢mgiwa is the wealth a person has with which to gamble or "a bet."

Overproduction

In Washo society some economic products were never distributed. This "problem of surplus" existed, in a society where starvation was well known, because storage and transportation were inadequate and trade was poorly developed.

An example is the overproduction of pinenuts. In years with abundant pinenuts, more was gathered than would actually be consumed. Since some nuts would be preserved into the next year this was a stored margin of safety in case the next year's crop was low. If pinenuts were again abundant, the remainder of the old crop that was not consumed was left to rot and the new nuts were gathered. Actually, any single grove of pinon trees will not